

## Vermont State Board of Education Monthly Report – January 2010

### ***From the Chair***

At its meeting on January 19, 2010, the State Board of Education addressed the following topics:

***Opportunity to Learn*** (Report of the Education Transformation Policy Commission) – At its meeting on January 19, 2010, the State Board voted to accept the report of the Education Transformation Policy Commission, *Opportunity to Learn: Defining Vermont education for a new Generation of Learners*. The commission was charged in early 2009 with proposing key policy actions that could support transformation. Entitled *Opportunity to Learn*, the report focuses on how every student can attain 21st century skills when provided with focused and personalized opportunities for learning. Following that action, the Board engaged in a discussion on Section V of the report: *Formation of Regional Education Districts*, and took the following action:

“That the State Board of Education support the creation of fewer education districts, each governed by a single board, which are large enough to incorporate the following four principles:

- To expand choice and learning opportunities for learners;
- To expand capacity for critical functions such as professional development, coordination of curriculum, instruction and assessment;
- To increase flexibility for use of staff and facilities;
- To strengthen coherent implementation of education transformation.

In addition, the State Board shall appoint, as soon as possible, an education redistricting commission to solicit stakeholder input on the commission’s recommendation and affirm or adjust the recommendation.”

The full report can be seen on the Department of Education Web site:

[http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/transformation/commission\\_resources.html](http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/transformation/commission_resources.html).

The State Board will continue discussion on the policy commission’s report at its February 16, 2010 meeting, focusing on Section II: *Learning Expectations for a New Generation*.

### ***From the Board***

#### **State Board Chair Fayneese Miller to Serve on National Task Force on State Actions to Develop Educators for the 21st Century –**

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is pleased to announce that Dr. Fayneese Miller, Chair of the Vermont State Board of Education, has been selected to serve on a year-long NASBE study group — *Developing Educators for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* — to examine the skills and knowledge required to teach and lead 21st century schools and administer districts.

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) conducts annual study groups to provide professional development to members of State Boards of Education, set organizational direction and priorities, inform the state education policymaking process on key issues, and provide recommendations to state education policymakers and the education community at large. As a member of the 2010 national task force, Dr. Miller will meet with other state board members, researchers, and policy analysts to examine the complex issues related to ensuring educators have the requisite competencies and adaptability to succeed in preparing students to meet postsecondary expectations for college and careers. In order to provide students with the world-class education envisioned by states, policy leaders must craft an effective human capital strategy for education that integrates recruitment, preparation, and retention policies as part of a cohesive educator development system.

Task force members will examine:

- Common core standards and international benchmarks and their potential impact on how effective teaching is defined;
- Models for preparing teachers and administrators who will be highly effective in a 21st century learning community;

- System supports and barriers to creating an effective 21st century education workforce; and
- Educator development policies required for continuous adaptation to 21st century technology and societal changes.

The study group will issue a comprehensive report in October 2010 at the NASBE Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, UT. The group's policy recommendations will be disseminated to relevant stakeholders including members of Congress, federal officials, governors, chief state school officers, and local education policymakers. NASBE represents America's state and territorial boards of education. It exists to strengthen State Boards as the preeminent educational policymaking bodies for citizens and students. For more, visit <http://www.nasbe.org>.

***From the Commissioner (Editorial appeared in Burlington Free Press, January 26, 2010)***

No one could argue with the fact that our state is facing significant financial hardship. My own department has cut staff by 20 percent over the last 18 months, and schools are being asked to significantly reduce spending. Something must be done to change the course of education spending in Vermont. I believe there is a way to save local taxpayers and the state millions of dollars a year in education spending for years to come and to continue to give Vermont students the outstanding education our state is known for.

We have one school board member for every 70 students. We have school buildings, with their operational budget, staffing and transportation costs, that house fewer students altogether than would be in a single classroom at our larger schools. We have 280 school districts, several with their own transportation, food service, and employee contracts. We have 87 school districts with fewer than 100 students. It is unrealistic to operate under a system that is over one hundred years old but is expected to produce 21<sup>st</sup> century results. If we are to see any improvement in education costs, this system must change. I recommend as a state that we seriously consider redistricting to reduce the number of districts and supervisory unions.

As an educator who has worked in many Vermont districts over the past 26 years, I have

observed firsthand the inefficiencies and inequities of our current system. These inequities, and the duplication of so many services, raise the cost of education but do not improve the quality of the educational experience for our children.

Many sincere individuals are concerned that a reduction in the number of school districts in the state would represent a loss of local control. To a certain extent this is a legitimate concern. However, state and federal testing and licensing rules, the increased requirements for special education and other special services, a statewide property tax to help pay for education and other legal parameters all minimize the control over the major issues related to operating a school district. Ultimately, our current system costs more and does not deliver the results I expect and I feel are possible.

Another concern I hear regarding redistricting is that schools and communities have different needs and wants for their students. But I have found that all communities want the same things from their local schools: safe and nurturing environments, high academic and social standards, positive leadership, a strong teaching staff and a responsible budget. Yet minor "differences" are used to justify keeping the system the same.

Let me be clear: This is not a new idea, nor is it a popular one. The former education commissioner wrote a document outlining his plan in 2007, and held thirty public meetings across the state to hear directly from Vermonters. A 2008 Snelling Center survey found that a majority of Vermonters polled believed that governance in Vermont is too complicated, and favored consolidation of school districts. Each time the subject is brought forth, lawmakers, school board members and educational leaders refused to consider any change to the system.

The federal Stimulus package bought us some time. But that is a short-term fix to a long-term problem. I believe we need to reduce the number of schools based on size of student body and geography. That would bring savings in terms of staff and school building operations. I believe we need to reduce the number of supervisory unions. That would eliminate administrators,

teachers and staff, and would force more effective and efficient operations of districts. Contracts would cover a larger number of people and systems (food, transportation, special education). My staff and I estimate this would save the state several million dollars a year. That may seem a drop in the bucket, but it would continue for years to come, and would improve the delivery of education and services to Vermont students.

And isn't that really what we all want? We want our students to have an excellent education. We want our students in classrooms headed by the best teachers in the state. We want our students prepared for colleges, careers and citizenship. A more streamlined delivery of education would continue to provide this, but with far greater impact per dollar. Striking a balance between what our pockets can pay for and what our children deserve is possible.

#### ***From the Department***

##### **NECAP Reading, Math & Writing**

**Assessment Results to be Released** – Reading, Math and Writing assessment results for Fall 2009 will be released publicly on February 2, 2010 by the department. The results are from the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Reading, Math and Writing assessment given to Vermont public school students in grades 3-8 and grade 11 in October 2009. For more information, go to [http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm\\_assessment/necap.html#memo](http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_assessment/necap.html#memo). Contact: Michael Hock at (802) 828-3115 or [michael.hock@state.vt.us](mailto:michael.hock@state.vt.us).

##### **Vermont School Crisis Planning Visits Still**

**Available** – The Vermont School Crisis Planning Team, supported by a grant from Vermont Homeland Security and Vermont Emergency Management, has funding available for school safety audits and visits for all Vermont public and private schools. The Team's facilitators, comprising retired principals and emergency responders, will assist schools in developing or reviewing their crisis response plans using the Vermont School Crisis Guide 2008. The guide is available at [http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/resources/model\\_policies/crisis\\_guide.html](http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/resources/model_policies/crisis_guide.html). A new FAQ section will be added to the sites this month with answers to school questions raised

during facilitator visits. Topics will cover door locks, cell phones, Vermont 2-1-1 and recommendations for classrooms response kits. Contact Information: Districts or individual schools wishing to schedule visits can contact the Committee Chair, Stephen Earley, at [searley@gmavt.net](mailto:searley@gmavt.net) or call (802) 434-4743. DOE Contact: Charles Johnson at (802) 828-0371 or [charles.johnson@state.vt.us](mailto:charles.johnson@state.vt.us)

##### **For additional information on upcoming Department of Education sponsored events for Spring 2010, visit**

<http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/calendar.html>. The calendar is updated regularly.

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##### **For more information on the Vermont State Board of Education, visit:**

<http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/mainboard.html>.

##### **To view approved minutes of SBE meetings:**

<http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/board/schedule.html#approved>

##### **To view State Board of Education's Monthly Reports:**

<http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/board/schedule.html#monthly-reports>

##### **2009-2010 State Board of Education Meeting**

**Dates:** February 16; March 16; April TBD; May 18; June TBD

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